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Intelligence must be reformed

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DURING the last few weeks, the U.S. intelligence community, including the CIA, the FBI and the Senate and House Intelligence Committees, has been staggered by a series of major blows that indicate the need for prompt reforms, and even in one case for radical institutional surgery.

Less publicized than the Yurchenko defection but far more serious in its potentially disastrous impact on the effectiveness of American intelligence throughout the world was the recent leak to the press of the Reagan administration's clandestine plans to weaken the Libyan dictator, Col. Muammer Khadafy.

Unless drastic and effective action to reduce the possibility of such leaks occurring in the future is clearly evident, even the friendliest foreign government will hesitate to cooperate with the U.S. in any joint enterprise that requires secrecy.

It is no exaggeration to state that leaks as serious as this one, if they go unpunished and unrepaired, can permanently cripple the CIA's ability to function in a dangerous world.

While the Justice Dept.'s Internal Security Section and the FBI pursue the long and usually fruitless search for the anonymous individuals who leaked the story, Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) is finding a surge of new, bipartisan support in the House for a joint resolution he introduced last January.

It calls for the creation of a single Joint Committee on Intelligence to replace the two existing Senate and House committees.

Although part of the administration's anti-Khadafy plan appears to have leaked from within the executive branch itself, Reagan officials and top CIA officers are convinced that many of the details were leaked or confirmed to the press by sources inside the intelligence committees.

It is Hyde's contention that now, if ever, is the time for Congress to clean up its act in its exercise of intelligence oversight.

The more than 50 House members who support the Hyde resolution believe that a single, slimmed-down committee in the intelligence field would accomplish two major objectives.

As compared with the 96 members and staffers who now make up the two committees, a single committee would allow a drastic reduction in the number of people exposed to the most sensitive secrets.

In addition, the present bloated and politicized staff structure could be replaced by a small group of professional experts.

National Security Council staffers and CIA officials would warmly welcome this institutional surgery since it would eliminate the duplication of briefings that is now necessary and would provide the executive with a single focal point of responsibility in Congress to deal with in times of crisis.

Former CIA directors Helms, Schlesinger and Turner are all on record in favor of this overdue change,

and it only remains for the Senate and House leadership to get on the bandwagon.

As compared with the Khadafy leak, the problems flowing from the defection of Vitaly Yurchenko are of a different magnitude and don't require drastic institutional change.

There is a growing consensus in the intelligence community that Yurchenko was probably a genuine defector and made his decision to return to Russia for a complex variety of personal reasons.

While the possibility that he might have been a double agent is being thoroughly explored, more attention is being paid to what reforms in the handling of genuine defectors are necessary to keep them on our side.

There is general agreement that the traumatic experience of defection requires sensitive management by a corps of specialists who are fully familiar with Russian language and culture. The testimony of recent defectors clearly shows that the CIA has a long way to go to improve its performance in this field.

Survivors of the defection process also make the point that early attention should be paid to the defector's desperate need for the security of a respectable job and an assured place in society.

Fortunately, a privately financed institution, the Jamestown Foundation, now exists to provide this kind of guidance and it has a remarkable record of success fully helping many who were on the verge of defection. In the future, this foundation will be called upon at an early stage in the course of resettlement.

In dealing with these defection problems and with so many other difficult issues, the U.S. intelligence agencies look forward to the day when they can cooperate with a genuinely bipartisan Joint Committee on Intelligence with a small professional staff that does not leak.

Testifying in closed session before the oversight committees as they are now constituted is, for intelligence officials, like playing Russian roulette with this nation's most valuable secrets.